

**REMARKS**

Reconsideration and allowance of the subject application are respectfully requested. By this Amendment, Applicant has added new claim 18. Thus, claims 1-18 are now pending in the application. In response to the Office Action, Applicant respectfully submits that the pending claims define patentable subject matter.

As a preliminary matter, Applicant thanks the Examiner for allowing claims 1-6 and 16.

Claims 12 and 13 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 112, second paragraph, as being indefinite because the Examiner asserts that it is unclear whether the entire sub-groove, or merely the central main portion of the sub-groove, is offset from the diagonal. Further, the Examiner indicates that should claims 9 and 10 be found allowable, claims 12 and 13 will be objected to under 37 C.F.R. § 1.75 as being a substantial duplicate thereof (i.e., claims 9 and 12 allegedly have the same scope and claims 10 and 13 allegedly have the same scope).<sup>1</sup> By this Amendment, Applicant has amended claims 12 and 13 to improve clarity by reciting that the central main portion of the sub-groove is arranged at a position offset from the diagonal. Further, claims 12 and 13 have been amended to further define the structure of the sub-grooves by reciting that the sub-grooves include end portions opening to the longitudinal main grooves and arc-shaped connecting portions connecting the end portions to the central main portion. Accordingly, the Examiner is requested to remove the § 112, second paragraph, rejection of record.

Claims 8, 9, 11 and 12 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Landers '766 (USP 5,176,766) in view of newly cited Ichiki (USP 5,327,953). Claims 10 and 11 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Landers '766 in view of Ichiki and Landers '169 (USP 5,824,169). Claims 7 and 15 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Landers '766 in view of Ichiki and EP '014 (EP 810104) and/or Lurois (USP 5,896,905). Claim 17 is rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Landers '766 in view of Ichiki and EP '890 (EP 573890). Applicant respectfully traverses the prior art rejections.

By this Amendment, Applicant has amended claim 7 to be dependent on allowed claim 1 and further define the claimed inclination of the sub-groove. Accordingly, Applicant respectfully submits that claim 7 should be allowable at least by virtue of its dependency on claim 1.

By this Amendment, Applicant has amended independent claims 8 and 17 to recite that:

the central main portion of the sub-groove formed in every block located at each of two tread regions when dividing the tread into the two tread regions in the widthwise direction of the tire by a circumferential groove located at or in the vicinity of a equatorial plane of the tire is arranged substantially in parallel to a diagonal of the block at a position offset from the diagonal at the same block part side when dividing the block into two block parts.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Although the Examiner asserts that claims 8 and 9 have the same scope as claims 12 and 13, respectively, it is apparent the Examiner meant to assert that claims 9 and 10 have the same scope as claims 12 and 13.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Figures 10-13B of the present application.

Applicant respectfully submits that the cited references, alone or in combination, do not teach or suggest this feature of the amended claims.

As shown in Figure 4 of Landers '766 (cited by the Examiner in support of the rejection of claims 8 and 17), the disclosed tread pattern is constructed so that the central main portion of the sub-groove formed in only each block located at both outermost block rows is offset from the diagonal. Ichiki (cited by the Examiner for disclosing a single sipe per block) discloses a tread pattern having seven rows of blocks of various shapes arranged in the circumferential direction, wherein the center, inner and outer block rows have different shapes and sipe structures.

Thus, Applicant respectfully submits that Landers '766 and Ichiki do not teach or suggest that the central main portion of the sub-groove formed in every block located at each of two tread regions when dividing a tread into the two tread regions in the widthwise direction of the tire by a circumferential groove located at or in the vicinity of a equatorial plane of the tire is arranged substantially in parallel to a diagonal of the block at a position offset from the diagonal at the same block part side when dividing the block into two block parts. Similarly, Applicant respectfully submits that the other cited references do not teach or suggest this feature of the claimed invention which is missing from Landers '766 and Ichiki.

Accordingly, Applicant respectfully submits that independent claims 8 and 17, as well as dependent claims 9-15, should be allowable because the combined references do not teach or suggest all of the features of the claims.

In view of the above, reconsideration and allowance of this application are now believed to be in order, and such actions are hereby solicited. If any points remain in issue which the

AMENDMENT UNDER 37 C.F.R. § 1.111  
U.S. Patent Application No. 09/886,119

Examiner feels may be best resolved through a personal or telephone interview, the Examiner is kindly requested to contact the undersigned at the telephone number listed below.

The USPTO is directed and authorized to charge all required fees, except for the Issue Fee and the Publication Fee, to Deposit Account No. 19-4880. Please also credit any overpayments to said Deposit Account.

Respectfully submitted,



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WASHINGTON OFFICE

**23373**

CUSTOMER NUMBER

Date: October 13, 2004

Attorney Docket No.: Q62668